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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of "The Color of Justice," by Cheryl L. Davis, the true story of the fight for freedom of an elementary school girl and an outspoken lawyer in the 1950s, and how they teamed up to change forever the way black and white Americans lived and learned together. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) The True Story of "The Color of Justice" (outlining the real-life events of the early 1950s in the lives of Linda Brown and Thurgood Marshall upon which the play is based, introducing the characters, and explaining some vocabulary terms); (2) The Supreme Court (outlining information about the Supreme Court); (3) The Color Line: Segregation in Daily Life (describing how activities and places were separated based on people's skin color, and offering an activity to help students understand the impact of segregation); (4) Production Notebook: A Closer Look (with ideas of things to listen and look for before and after the performance, a discussion of how an actor can play three different people, description of cooperation on and off stage, and the important role of the audience in this collaboration); and (5) Thurgood Marshall (offering a brief biography of the man who helped to significantly redefine America's sense of justice). Resources for further exploration are listed. (SR)

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"The Color of Justice": by Cheryl L. Davis, Presented by Theatreworks U.S.A. Cue Sheet for Students.

by Charlotte Stoudt

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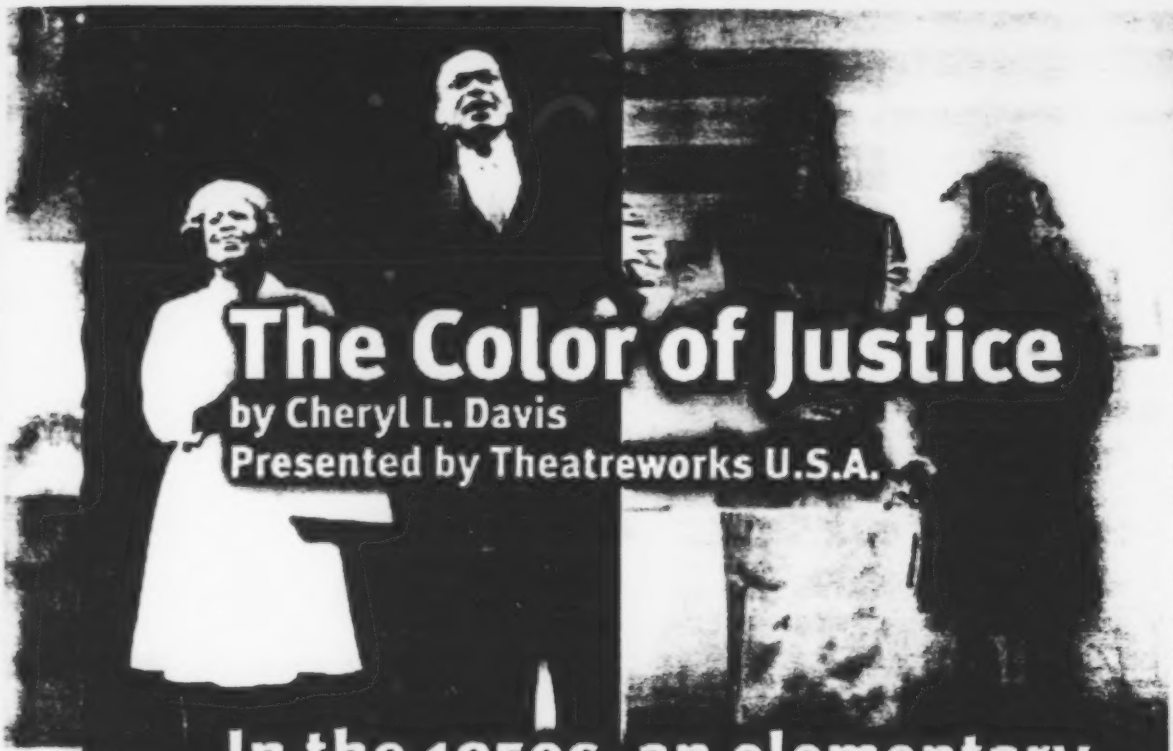
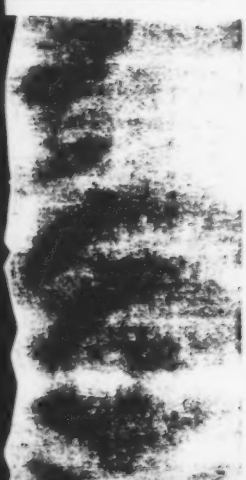


The Color of Justice

by Cheryl L. Davis

Presented by Theatreworks U.S.A.

In the 1950s, an elementary school girl teamed up with an outspoken lawyer to change forever the way black and white Americans lived and learned together. *The Color of Justice* tells the true story of their fight for freedom.



The Kennedy Center

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Cue sheet FOR STUDENTS

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed for use before and after attending a performance of *The Color of Justice*.

This Cuesheet contains:

The True Story of *The Color of Justice*, *page 2*

The Supreme Court, *page 3*

The Color Line: Segregation in Daily Life, *pages 4–5*

Production Notebook: A Closer Look, *pages 6–7*

Thurgood Marshall, *page 8*

Resources, *page 8*

The True Story of The Color of Justice

A play based on the real-life events of the early 1950s in the lives of Linda Brown and Thurgood Marshall.

It is 1951 in Topeka, Kansas. Schools, as well as most public facilities, are **segregated** according to race. Blacks and whites live separate lives. African-American student **Linda Brown,** sitting in her elementary school classroom, wonders why her school always receives the worn-out textbooks and other cast-offs of Washington Elementary, a white school near Linda's house, and the school that Linda's friend **Tommy** attends. Her teacher, **Mr. Jackson,** asks the same thing, but is told by **Superintendent Edwards** that he should be happy with what his school already has.

What other cast-offs might Linda's school have gotten from Washington Elementary?

At home, Linda and her friend **Jane** argue about whether or not Linda could go to Washington Elementary. Linda's father **Oliver** overhears them, and decides to write a letter to **Thurgood Marshall,** an African-American lawyer working for the **NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)**. He tells Marshall how angry he is that his daughter is receiving an education unequal to that of white children.

In this synopsis, the characters' names are bolded. This play uses only six actors. How many different characters do they play?

Marshall speaks at the Browns' church, telling the congregation about the court case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson,* which led to the establishment of the legal separation of races, known as "separate but equal." That night, Marshall and one of his assistants, **Jack Greenberg,** tell Oliver and his wife **Leola** that the NAACP wants to use Linda's situation to fight for **integration** – all the way to the **Supreme Court.** The Browns agree to take their case to court. As a number of **Judges** announce in their court decisions, Marshall and Greenberg lose several state court cases concerning integration. This means that they are able to ask the Supreme Court to consider their **appeals.** The Browns are criticized by both friends and strangers for their support of Marshall's work.

Why do you think that even the Browns' friends might criticize them?

The Supreme Court agrees to hear Marshall's arguments. He is opposed by a famous and respected lawyer, **John C. Davis.** The Court, represented in the play by **Justice Warren,** begins to hear arguments in the case. Marshall is persuasive–but so is Davis. Thurgood Marshall discovers he needs Linda's help one more time to win this case – and to change history forever!

segregated – divided according to race

NAACP ("N-double A-C.P.") – an organization founded in 1909 to work for the rights of African Americans

integration – members of different groups or races existing together as equals

Supreme Court – the highest court in the United States (see page 8)

appeals – legal actions by which court cases are taken from lower courts to higher, appellate courts to be considered again

ruling – decision by a court that is binding by law

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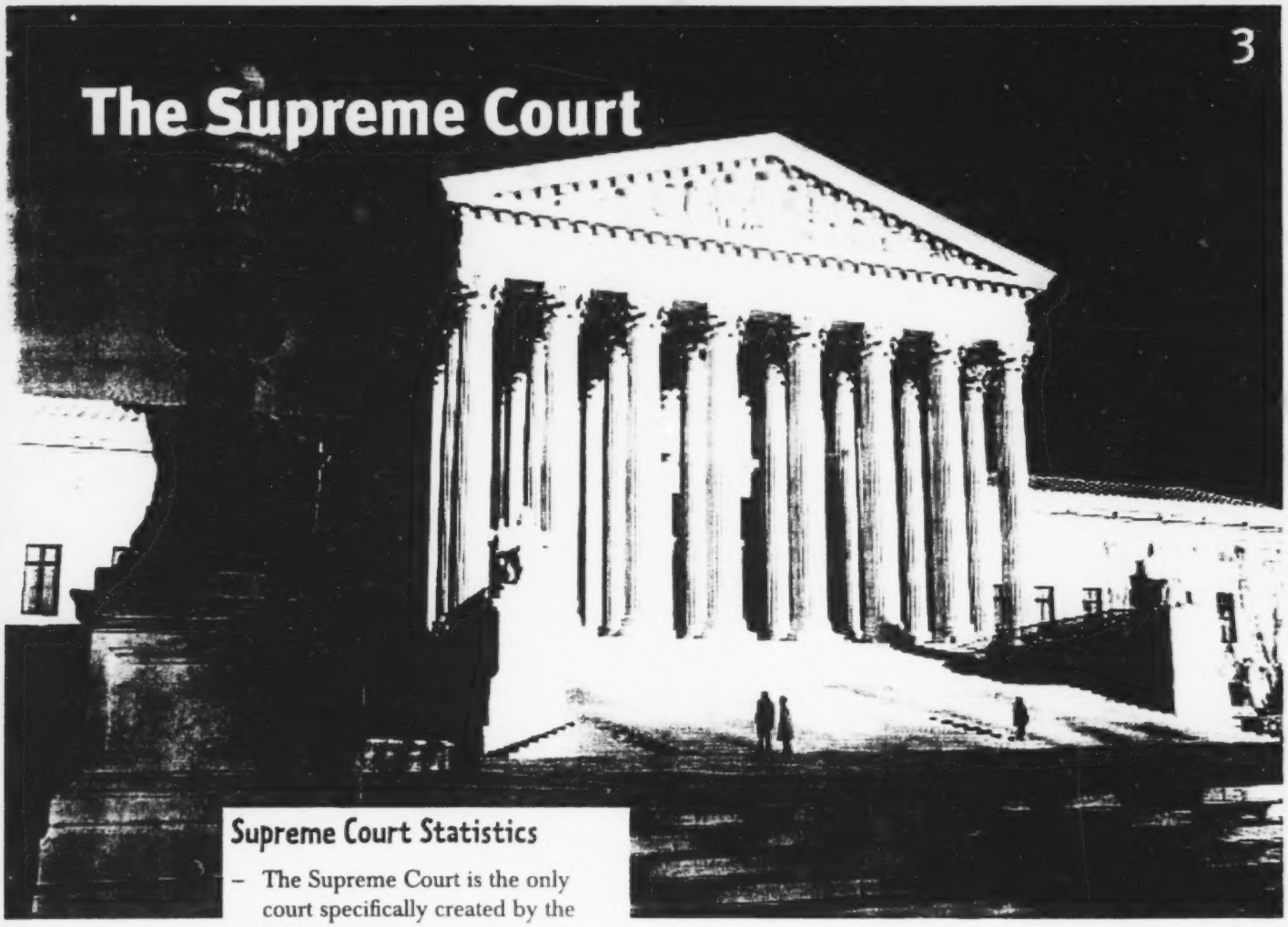
The Supreme Court



Supreme Court Statistics

- The Supreme Court is the only court specifically created by the U.S. Constitution.
- The Court has nine members: a chief justice, and eight associate judges.
- The motto carved into the marble above the entrance to the Supreme Court building reads: "Equal Justice Under the Law."
- The Court hears on average 125 cases a year. The Court generally hears cases that involve interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.
- Once appointed, justices may remain in office for life.
- Oral (spoken) arguments from opposing sides in a case last only one half hour – this has to summarize thousands of hours of research and legal thinking!

The Color Line

Segregation in Daily Life

"If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public; if he cannot send his children to the best public school available; if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him; if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?"
—President John F. Kennedy, 1963

It's hard today to imagine what segregation was like for those who lived with it each day of their lives. Only a few decades ago, activities and places were separated based on people's skin color. These were conditions that people like the Browns and Thurgood Marshall experienced every day:

In public places in ten states, rest rooms, water fountains, and waiting rooms were labeled "colored" and "white."

In 14 states, public transportation companies demanded that black patrons sit in the back of buses or in separate cars of a train.

Separate Bibles were used for black and white witnesses in court.

Do any situations in which blacks and whites remain separate still exist today? What are they? Are they legal separations? Why do they exist?

In Arkansas, white and black voters could not enter a polling place at the same time. In the South, blacks were often threatened with violence if they tried to register to vote.

In Florida, white and black students could not use the same editions of some textbooks.

African Americans had to sit in a special place in movie theaters — usually in the balcony.

In many department stores owned by whites, African Americans were not allowed to try on hats or clothes.

There were separate hospitals, funeral homes, and cemeteries for blacks and whites.

Activity: Separate But Equal?

Try your own experiment with segregation:

1. Divide your class according to some "rule": short hair vs. long hair, jeans vs. other clothes, long-sleeved shirts vs. short-sleeved shirts. It doesn't matter if there are a lot of people in one group and not very many in the other.

2. Identify one group as the one with fewer privileges. Decide which spaces at your school (which bathrooms, hallways, etc.) this group cannot use. This same group will have to stand at the end of the lunch line, sit in the back of the class, and leave the class last when the bell rings.

3. People from the two groups should not sit together at lunch, nor should they talk to each other unless necessary.

4. The next day, talk about how the separation felt. How did it feel to be a "second-class citizen"? Was it just inconvenient? Did anyone begin to feel angry or frustrated?

5. Talk to your older relatives. Do they remember how they felt about segregation? Does anyone remember the day the Supreme Court decided in favor of Linda Brown and Thurgood Marshall?

The Cast of *The Color of Justice*

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Production Notebook

A Closer Look

Your mission is to be an audience member who is clued in. This means that you notice visual and dialogue clues left by the actors and the theatrical production team to help you understand the events of the play and their meanings. Here are a few clues:

What To Listen For:

Before the Performance

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the republic for which it stands. One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

"The Pledge of Allegiance" is heard twice during the play–at the beginning and at the end. When the play opens, Linda and her African-American classmates are reciting the pledge at their segregated school. At the end, Linda recites the pledge again–in a class made up of black *and white* students.

After the Performance

Discuss whether the events of the play show that America is in fact united, or "indivisible"?

Does Linda's struggle suggest that the Pledge of Allegiance describes an America that does not yet exist, but must be created through racial understanding? Why or why not?

What other pledges do you hear in the play? Do the characters who make pledges keep them?

What To Look For:

Before the Performance

Colors: The Dolls and the Crayons. The title of the play alerts you to think about color. It's a theme (an important idea) that is brought up in nearly every scene – whether Linda and Jane are arguing about crayons, or Linda is deciding which doll she likes best.

Thurgood Marshall argues that black and white children have equal promise – and both deserve a good education.

If both skin colors are "equal," what is the color of justice? Does it have one?

After the Performance

What happens to Linda and Jane's friendship when they try to divide the crayons and the living room instead of sharing?

Why does Linda prefer the white doll at the beginning of the play?

Why does she cry when Thurgood Marshall asks her about which doll is smarter — and which doll she looks like? How does Linda's reaction help Marshall win the court case?

What happens to the African-American doll at the end of the play?

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Building Character

Many people were involved in the struggle to desegregate American schools – but they don't all end up on stage in *The Color of Justice*. Part of the fun of watching the play is seeing a company, or group of actors, take on a number of different roles. One actor, for instance, will portray Jack Greenberg, Linda's friend Tommy, and Justice Warren.

How does an actor play three different people?

Working with the director and costume designer, the actor must make a series of decisions about how to play each character in a different way. Each character must have a distinctive way of:

- **dressing**
  Which costume pieces belong to which character?
- **walking/standing**
  How will Greenberg walk differently from Tommy?
- **talking**
  What kinds of speech patterns or accents does each character have?
- **gesturing**
  What kind of mannerisms does each character have?
- **communicating his or her goal**
  How does the actor show clearly what each character wants in the different scenes?

Cooperation On and Off Stage

Linda Brown would never have been able to attend an integrated school without the help of a number of people who shared her dream. And Thurgood Marshall needed Linda's help to know how best to argue for integration. The history of America – and of the **civil rights** movement in particular – is all about people *uniting* to make a difference. For example:

civil rights – **rights that guarantee equal opportunities in all aspects of life to all citizens, including education, housing, and jobs**

In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. She was arrested and protestors united to organize a boycott – they refused to use the bus and persuaded others to find alternate means of transportation. Thousands of African Americans walked, hitchhiked, or carpooled to get to their jobs every day. The bus company lost a lot of money, and the boycott received national attention. A year later, the Supreme Court declared segregated busing against the Constitution.

A play, too, cannot happen without cooperation between people who share a love of theater. From the director's talks with the actors about what they want in each scene and how they will move about the stage to the execution of a change in stage lighting, teamwork is *everything*. The actress who plays both Jane and Leola has several quick costume changes. Notice when she disappears off stage and comes back wearing a different costume. Her quick change is possible only by teamwork among cast members backstage.

There is one more important collaborator —You!

By paying attention to what the actors are saying and feeling, your reactions – whether you laugh or hold your breath – create a sense of excitement. Even if they don't show it, actors are aware of your every reaction. The performers need you to focus on the story, because it's your imagination that transforms six actors and a couple of signs into Kansas in the 1950s.

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Thurgood Marshall

Redefining America's Sense of Justice

Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993) was born in a racially divided America. Hundreds of African Americans were killed by white mobs every year – a fact essentially ignored by many law enforcers and politicians. Angered by such injustice, young Thurgood often rebelled and got himself into serious trouble. Once, after tricking an assistant principal into making a fool of himself, Thurgood was punished by being forced to memorize the U.S. Constitution (which later came in handy). Undaunted, he continued to use his impressive height and quick wit to resist what he felt was any unjust authority.

"A man who sees the world exactly as it is and pushes on to make it what it can become." —Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on Thurgood Marshall

After graduating from high school, Thurgood wanted to attend the University of Maryland, but was refused on the basis of his race. Thurgood decided to go instead to Lincoln University in Nebraska, where he studied dentistry, until one of his wisecracks caused him to fail biology. He finally decided to go into law, and enrolled in Washington, D.C.'s Howard University Law School. His mother pawned her engagement and wedding rings to help pay his tuition. She never got them back, but Thurgood quickly established himself as a star student, so adept at legal argument that one of his mentors suggested he work as a lawyer for the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), a civil rights organization founded in 1909.

Marshall worked for the NAACP from 1939 to 1961, winning an astonishing number of victories over segregation and transforming the possibilities for race relations in America. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy nominated Marshall to a seat on the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York. Six years later, he became a Supreme Court justice. Until his retirement in 1991, Marshall remained a passionate defender of African Americans and other minorities.

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Resources

Books

Cowan, Tom, and Jack Maguire. *Timelines of African-American History: 500 Years of Black Achievement.* NY: Roundtable Books, 1994.

King, Casey, and Barrett, Linda. *Oh, Freedom! Kids Talk About The Civil Rights Movement With The People Who Made It Happen.* Foreword by Rosa Parks. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. Contains informative and inspiring interviews conducted by teenagers.

Kluger, Richard. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown vs. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality.* NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.* NY: Penguin, 1976. The award-winning story of an African-American family fighting racism in the South during the Depression.

Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize 1954-1965: America's Civil Rights Years.* NY: Viking, 1987.

Videos

The Long Walk Home. Directed by Richard Pearce, with Whoopi Goldberg and Sissy Spacek. Live Entertainment, 1989. VHS Format.

Separate But Equal. Directed by George Stevens, Jr., with Sidney Poitier as Thurgood Marshall. Republic Pictures Home Video, 1991. VHS Format.

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